Russia Take Gold After Dominant Display in Team Figure Skating

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Julia Lipnitskaya was the star of the show. **Alexander Vilf**

SOCHI — President Vladimir Putin gazed down approvingly from the stands as his country schooled the rest of the world in figure skating, winning its first gold medal of the Sochi Olympics in the process.

Sunday saw Russia win the inaugural team event in the Olympic figure skating program, an eight-round shootout with ten other nations at the Iceberg Skating Palace on the Black Sea coast.

Julia Lipnitskaya was the star of the show, a 15-year-old prodigy mature beyond her years who was the only competitor to win both short and free programs other than Charlie White and Meryl Davis in the ice dance.

Despite being more than twice his precocious compatriot's age, Evgeni Plushenko came

second in the short program and won his free skate on Sunday as Russia charged to the top of the leaderboard, eventually winning it by 10 points from Canada.

"It is the first medal for Russia this Olympics. I love being first," Plushenko said. "I have such a great team around me; my wife, my coach, my choreographer, my manager. They help me so much and I skated for them, for my sons. I would love to have more medals."

The Canadians came into the event as overwhelming favorite for gold with the biggest squad of any nation, but never recovered from Patrick Chan's disappointing third place behind Plushenko in the short program.

The U.S. also got off to a poor start as Jeremy Abbott fell and came fifth, and Ashley Wagner came fourth, with the nation ultimately claiming the bronze a further five points back.

The manner of Russia's victory was a slight anticlimax: Plushenko's win left Canada needing to triumph in the women's singles event that followed. The moment America's Gracie Gold scored higher than Kaetlyn Osmond, Russia's first Winter Games gold medal on home soil was confirmed, rendering Lipnitskaya's mesmerizing skate meaningless in the medal allocation.

The night rounded off with American pair White and Davis winning the ice dance over perennial rivals Scott Moir and Tessa Virtue. Russia's European silver medalists Elena Ilinykh and Nikita Katsalapov came third.

Putin, dressed in a bright red Russian team track suit, came down to the ice to congratulate Lipnitskaya, Plushenko and the rest of the team, also shaking hands with some of their rivals including Charlie White of the U.S.

Russia had charged into the lead in the team event on Thursday, when world champions Tatiana Volosozhar and Maxim Trankov won the short program in the pairs and Plushenko finished runner-up to Yuzuru Hanyu of Japan.

Half way through the event on Saturday, Russia had accrued a five-point lead courtesy of Lipnitskaya's victory and a win for Maxim Trankov and Tatiana Volosozhar in the pairs free.

It was the first time the team event was held in Olympic competition.

Countries sent out skaters in all four categories: men's and women's individual, pairs and ice dance. They all performed a short program, and the winners of each segment earned 10 points for their country, the runners-up nine, third place eight, down to one point for last place.

The points were aggregated and the top five nations progressed to the free program while the others were eliminated.

The introduction of the team event gave skaters a second shot at a medal, which they welcomed, but it also came with the inherent risk of injury before the traditional individual disciplines.

Attention now turns to the individual events, which begin Tuesday with the pairs.

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